

VIEWPOINTS

OUR VIEW: STATE'S PRE-K PROGRAM IS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT WE DO RIGHT, AND WRONG 2F

HEALTH

Let's tackle tobacco's harm with force

Nearly half a century after the surgeon general's report, cigarettes still kill too many Americans

By ALAN BLUM

To observe the 1980 World Health Day theme of "Smoking or Health — The Choice is Yours," 24 countries issued an anti-smoking postage stamp.

Since then, 41 other countries have recognized the importance of tackling the tobacco pandemic by issuing such stamps.

The United States is not among those 65 countries with an anti-smoking stamp.

Dr. W. Jeff Terry, president-elect of the Medical Association of the

State of Alabama, wants the medical profession and the public alike to correct this glaring oversight. Last month, the American Medical Association approved his resolution that calls on physicians to campaign for a stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health.

In the two decades following the report, more than 20 million Americans kicked the habit, resulting in a significant decline in heart attacks and a slow but steady decrease in lung cancer in men.

The Alabama connection is important, because the individual most responsible for the report was Dr. Luther Terry (1911-1985), a native son of Red Level and a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College

(and cousin of Jeff Terry).

In 2002, Luther Terry was inducted posthumously into the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame for his contributions as surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service, the nation's physician in chief, from 1961 to 1965.

The report was the culmination of growing scientific concerns about cigarette smoking over four decades. By 1940, one of the most outspoken opponents of smoking, Dr. Alton Ochsner of Tulane University, would publish his observations on the association between cigarettes and lung cancer, citing more than 400 reports in medical journals. In 1961, the presidents of several health groups, including the

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TOM SCARRITT

Jefferson County reboot brings hope

Sometimes, our computers become so dysfunctional our only option is to reboot.

We may lose some of our work in progress, but at least we have a clean interface with all the systems we need to get the job done. We can move forward.

Jefferson County voters have rebooted county government, booting out the only sitting commissioner who had the audacity to seek re-election.



After the November general election, a very different County Commission will take office.

Starting over brings many advantages for a county mired in mismanagement, tainted by corruption and overwhelmed by unmanageable debt. It is an opportunity for new ideas, new approaches and new solutions to replace the strategy of stubborn incompetence with which the current commission has faced its many challenges.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity, though, is for a new relationship with the Jefferson County legislative delegation. That delegation has been the source of much of the malware that has infected the systems of county government, but the county cannot function without connecting to the State House.

The architecture of county government, as drawn up in the Constitution of 1901, allows very little freedom for the county to act independently. The commission needs permission from the Legislature for most of the important decisions it makes.

Although elected to serve the same constituents, the commissioners and the legislators have long acted like incompatible operating systems. The biggest crash came when the commission asked for the Legislature's help in making the county occupational tax more fair. Instead, the legislators tried to insert a virus into the law that would have diverted some of the tax proceeds to their own pet projects.

We are still paying for the fallout from that falling out.

We do not have to repeat the errors of the past, though. A new commission means a fresh start. At least one legislator already sees the possibilities.

It is critical that the Jefferson County House and Senate delegations delete the past and work diligently to create an environment of cooperation and do just that: cooperate," state Rep. Oliver Robinson said in a letter published Thursday in The News.

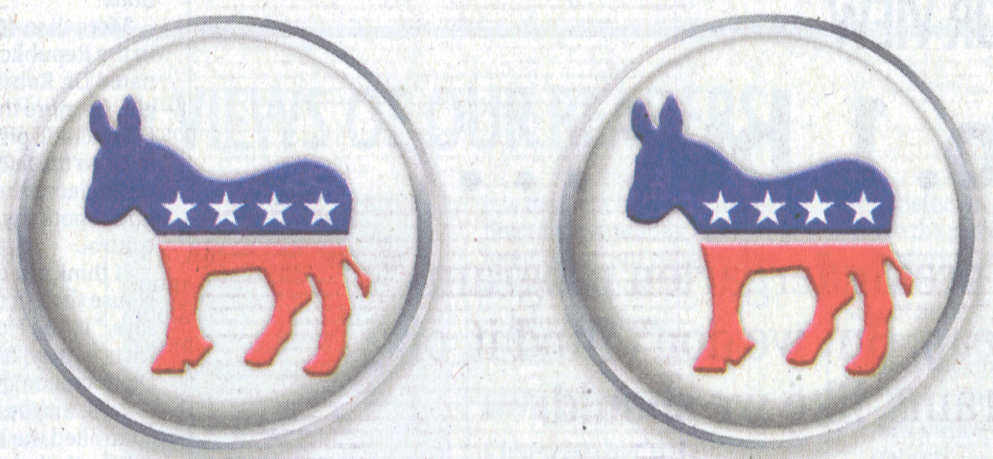
Robinson invited commissioners and legislators to "come together in a meeting so we can begin working on a Jefferson County agenda."

Framing the agenda for Jefferson County really should be the job of the people we elected to govern the county. Without home rule, though, the legislators remain key players in the decision-making network. Robinson's notion they should play a constructive role in solving the county's problems is a welcome step forward.

The new commissioners should not wait for the hand-delivered invitations Robinson promised in his letter. They should set up a high-speed connection to the legislative delegation as soon as they take office.

Tom Scarritt is editor of The News. E-mail: tscarritt@bhamnews.com.

CAMPAIGN 2010 ★ THE NATIONAL VIEW



FACING DISAPPOINTMENT

The Economist

This is a miserable time to be a Democratic Party politician in America, especially if you are a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Most nonpartisan pollsters and pundits agree that the Democrats can expect a thumping on Nov. 2, when all of the 435 seats in the House and 36 of the 100 in the Senate will be up for grabs in the midterm elections. By general consent, the Republicans are unlikely to gain the 10 seats they need to capture the Senate from the Democrats. In the House, on the other hand, the Democrats' majority hangs by a whisker.

A nice indication of how close a race it is comes from a study by Alan Abramowitz, a political scientist at Emory University. He calculated last month that the Republicans are on track to win 42 House seats currently held by Democrats and lose just three of their own seats. That would give them a net gain of 39, which, by coincidence, is exactly how many they need to gain control. Nancy Pelosi would then have to sur-

The country is in the sort of unhappy and scratchy mood that voters in midterm elections habitually take out on the president's party. The only question is how bad will things be for Democrats in November?



If Democrats lose a majority in the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi will have to surrender the gavel to a Republican.

render the speaker's gavel she won in 2006 to the Republicans' John Boehner, who would preside over a majority of 218 to 217 — tiny, but enough to make life wretched for Barack Obama's White House.

Abramowitz's projection is only one of many to suggest that the election is tight. Although the analysis of the Cook Political Report still puts the Democrats' losses between 30 and 40, Charlie Cook, an expert on the horse race, says his "gut" tells him that the Democrats will lose "a few more than 40."

Comparisons with the wave that saw the Republicans take the House for the first time in 40 years at the 1994 midterms are inescapable. Like Bill Clinton then, Obama has seen his approval rating shrivel to under 50 percent; our YouGov poll has him at just 43 percent, though the average of all such polls is three points higher. People are once again deeply dissatisfied with both the performance of the Democratic Congress and the direction of the country.

What has gone wrong for the Democrats? Almost everything. For all the stimulus spending, unemployment remains

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A vote to veto race-based politics

White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East or North Africa.

— Racial definition from the U.S. Census Bureau

By COURTLAND MILLOY

With all the talk lately about "white vote," I thought it would be helpful to know what a white person is. As the census definition makes clear, who knows? It's a biological fiction, a figment of the pigment

beneath which all human beings are the same.

And yet, with midterm elections just a few months away, the so-called white vote looms large, an angry and vindictive political force. A Washington Post/ABC News poll released last week showed that President Obama's approval ratings have reached "a new low among whites, at 40 percent, with his positive marks dipping under 50 percent for the first time among white college-educated women."

Does race have anything to do with it? You betcha.

"What explains the white surge to the GOP?" commentator Patrick Buchanan asks in a recent issue of the American Conservative magazine. Among the answers, he says, is "a growing perception that Obama is biased." Or, as Glenn Beck said last year on his Fox TV show, Obama has a "deep-seated hatred for white people or the white



There is no escaping the role of race in the animosity toward President Barack Obama.

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INSIDE

The end is near

Alabama GOP Chairman Mike Hubbard is warming up for the final sprint in a long race to wrest control of the Legislature from Democrats, writes The News' Joey Kennedy. 2F

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